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REVIEW OF *THE MONTH*

Law & Order

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Prologue

2003 is here, and so is the Inventory 3 (only 97 left for the 100th issue anniversary), which is the biggest in number of pages so far. In the Inventory 3 our celebrity corner gets full of guests again! The team that won The Inventory award for best fan-made adventure in 2002, Tierra, lets us know of their plans for the future and talk about their amazing remake of King's Quest 2.

Frogwares are in the celebrity corner also to talk about one of the most promising adventures on the works right now. I am talking about Journey to the center of the earth, a 3rd person adventure based on the book of Jules Verne and the heroine, Ariane, looks ready to get in the competition between April Ryan and Kate Walker.

On the review of the month you will get to see if you could make it as a lawyer or as a detective in Law & Order: Dead on the money, the 1st person adventure based on the TV series. As you probably already understood from the cover, the review tribute this month pays homage to the 3rd and last part of Jane Jensen's astounding Gabriel Knight series.

We get to travel one more time to Egypt in Cameron Files 2, Pharaoh's Curse to solve one more enigma, taking place in the land of the sun. Sometimes I feel I've seen all corners of Egypt through adventure games.

In the preview section you can take a sneak peek in Black Mirror, a dark adventure that will remind you of older masterpieces like Darkseed and Shadow of the comet. You can also check out the other adventure of Frogwares, Sherlock Holmes, that's due to release soon in the Nordic Region (as you can also read in the interview with Frogwares). But I think that this is enough warming up for now. Let's get down to business.

Dimitris Manos
Nordic Adventure Guild

P.S.: In order to get 100% of satisfaction while reading this issue it is highly recommended to print it out and read it next to a source of heat (i.e. a fireplace) drinking something warm (like hot chocolate).

Previews

As you can probably see for yourself the guy on the right does not look very happy. Actually, I wouldn't bet on seeing lots of happy people in the upcoming adventure Black Mirror. Unknown Identity is a company based in the Czech Republic that is producing one of the best candidates for adventure of the year for 2003. The Black Mirror will be a 3rd person point and click adventure that will be better played during the night with the lights turned off.

You will take the role of Samuel Gordon, who had decided to move out from the Black Mirror manor that belonged to him in order to avoid horrible events that happened there. Fate however had different plans for Samuel and he is obliged to come back after the death of William Gordon. Samuel will soon find out that there is more to the death of William than what he heard. You will have to guide Samuel in this attempt to solve the mystery behind the death of William Gordon.

In the site of the game (http://www.futuregames.cz/poselsmrti/hlavni-Eng.html) there is a lot of information and you can also download a playable English demo of the game, as well as some music tracks. The music tracks sound quite eerie and they seem to suit the game like a glove.

In the demo of the game you can play through a couple of locations in Wales and try out the interface of the game, which seemed pretty straightforward. When you browse your cursor over the screen it will highlight over a hotspot and the first time you click Samuel will give a description of the object while the second time you click Samuel will perform an action. On the lower part of your screen you can see your inventory items. By right clicking on them you will see a short description of them, while you can pick them up by left clicking on them.

The game will take about 30 hours to finish according to its developers and it will be ready in the end of October. Whether we're going to see it in the shelves here in the Nordic region remains to be seen.

Sherlock Holmes: The Mystery of The Mummy is a new adventure of the most famous detective in the world. Frogwares that are also guests of our celebrity corner this month are the developers of this 1st person adventure. You can read more info about the story of Sherlock's adventure in the interview with Frogwares. Another thing that you will read in the interview is that the game is going to be released in the Nordic region soon. The screenshot of Elizabeth Montcalfe that you can see in the lower right corner made me think for the first time in my life that a 3-D generated character was beautiful. You can download a demo from the main site of the game, which is http://www.frogwares.com.ua/sherlock/htm/en/story.htm

Adventure Gossip

The return of the legends?

It seems like some of the biggest legends in the adventure community are thinking of returning to game development. Jane Jensen, the creator of the award winning series Gabriel Knight, has confirmed that she is working on a new project (she hasn't revealed however what this new project is and if it is a new adventure or not).

Bill Tiller (Dig, Curse of Monkey Island) has already announced that he is thinking of starting his own adventure game (he was actually asking the forum members of Just Adventure if they prefer 2D or 3D adventures to help him decide which path to follow).

Roberta Williams, creator of the King's Quest series, left a hint in the Just Adventure forums that she might be coming back in the near future, while Ragnar Tornquist, of The Longest Journey, writes from his journal that it is quite certain that TLJ2 will be produced and that it is just a matter of when. This is definitely sweet music to the ears of every adventurer.

Dedication of Tierra

Would you ever move on the other side of the globe to do something that you have a passion for even if you did not make money out of it?

Well before you say that this kind of things do not happen nowadays, you should read the latest newsletter of Tierra where they say that the Anonymous Game Developer 1 will move from USA to Australia in order to be closer to the rest of the Tierra team and by doing so being able to produce adventures faster and more efficiently. I wonder if they will ever stop impressing us with their dedication.

Are you a true Gabriel Knight fan?

Then prove it! American Interactive Pictures that had purchased the video production operation of Sierra is selling a big variety of Gabriel Knight memorabilia (items that were used in the sets of Gabriel Knight 2).

Most have already been sold but you can still buy the cement wolf paw print, Gabriel's tape recorder, Grace's clothes or even a werewolf mask. The most crazy of you might want to buy the hunting lodge's second floor façade, the hunt club bar or the front doors of Rittersberg castle!!!! They even sell memorabilia from Phantasmagoria. The address is:
http://www.aipictures.com/gk

The Celebrity Corner

Tierra

Tierra's King's Quest 2: Romancing the Stones won the Inventory award for best fan made adventure of 2002. The amount of work these people did is beyond imagination, considering the fact that there is no financial gain from all this work. The Tierra team was kind and shared with us some of their knowledge.

First of all I would like to thank you all for participating in the interview. I was really amazed with KQ2 and Tierra is definitely one of the most promising adventure companies for the future. It is an honour to have you in this month's celebrity corner. Now to the questions.

Themselves:

- Tell us a little bit about yourselves.

AGD1: SWF, 23, tall, fit, exotic; enjoys horseback riding, travelling, drawing, and candlelight dinners under the stars. Sweet, knowledgeable, adventurous, and fun--looking for companionship or a little bit more. Adventure game playing is a bonus. If you want a good time...oh wait, wrong publication...

AGD2: One of my bad points is the inability to tell people a little bit about myself in much detail.

Wookie: I am a chocolate addict. Between eclairs, I occasionally write stuff.

Tom: Dianne and I met online (pre-Internet days) in the mid 1980's, and eventually fell in love. We were both musicians and shared a deep interest in the MIDI revolution. Today, when we're not involved with music, Dianne spends much of her time hosting an online embroidery shop, and I manage a small hospital laboratory.

- How did Tierra start? When and how did everybody jump on board?

AGD2: For AGD1 and I, Tierra started as a method of discovering how to make adventure games. Originally, we had planned to make a KQ1 parody (amongst ourselves) called Royal Quest. This project soon transformed into a faithful VGA remake of King's Quest 1 instead. When we saw that our project was coming along better than we had hoped, we wondered if other people who missed the old Sierra adventure games might enjoy it too. So we released the game publicly, people downloaded it, and things took off from there!

Wookie: I beta-tested Tierra's KQ1VGA remake. Then I pitched an idea to the AGDs for a KQ2 remake, with additional story elements. The project grew from there, and now they're stuck with me!

Tom: I came on board when KQ1 VGA was nearing release. I offered to mix Sierra's original KQ1 soundtrack for General MIDI support, and provide some enhanced Roland MT-32 tracks for the optional digital Music Pack.

- Do you play adventures yourselves? Which are your favourite adventures (old/recent)?

AGD1: I sure do! As of now, KQ2:RTS is my favorite. Games from the past that stood out amongst my favorites were King's Quest 3, King's Quest 5, The Black Cauldron, Quest for Glory 3, Quest for Glory 1, and Quest for Glory 4 (if those darn bugs had been taken care of, it might be at the top of the list). I'd say that Quest for Glory was my favorite series--I really loved the cultural elements, and becoming a hero based on your noble qualities isn't all that shabby either.

AGD2: Yep, although I don't find too much spare time to do that these days. My all time favourite game in QFG2, Gabriel Knight 1 also ranks up there with the best of them. It's very hard for me to pick favourites though, since I like a lot of games for their own individuality.

Wookie: My first adventure game was SQ3, which I played at the humble age of about 12. Nostalgia would dictate that to be my favourite.

Tom: Of course! My favorite to date is KQ2:RTS! (What can I say -- it's a great game!) I've always been partial to Sierra's Space Quest and Leisure Suit Larry series, and the first Monkey Island adventure from LucasArts.

King's Quest 2: Romancing The Stones

General
- Who came up with the idea for the 3D sequence in the introduction and how was it implemented?

Wookie: I wrote such a sequence in the short novel, which was transferred to the screenplay. I suggested for it to be a montage of shots, but the AGCs thought it could be done with 3D. The early attempt was interesting, but I'm glad we managed to enlist the talents of an excellent 3D artist!

- How much time did it take to produce KQ2 remake altogether? What was the average time per day you worked to finish the project?

Tom: Musically, we put in an average of 2-4 hours a day; sometimes a lot more, sometimes a lot less.

Wookie: From conception (June 2001) to release (December 2002), about 18 months.

AGD2: Let's not even go there!

- Did you have any contact with Roberta Williams? Has she seen KQ2 remake yet?

Wookie: To the first question, no. To the second, don't know (but hope so!)

- How many times has KQ2 been downloaded so far? By the way, how many times was KQ1 downloaded?

Wookie: From 3/12/02 to 23/12/02, approx. 12,800 downloads for KQ2VGA. As for KQ1VGA... in excess of 70,000. Probably a lot more!

Story / Gameplay

- What were the differences in the story between the original KQ2 and the remake?

Wookie: Oh God. What a question! Without spoiling the storylines of either game, in the original version there was nothing to do with the likes of Gervain, Door of Destiny, pumpkins, swans, Brotherhood, town, libraries, haystack, Sharkees, Cloud Spirit, tests, emeralds, night, multiple nosferatu, youth potion, swamp, stone lions, coconuts... or "The Father".

- What is the creature that is hidden in the haystack anyway?

Wookie: No idea. But Tom has a theory.

Tom: I don't feel it would be prudent to discuss the creature for this interview. Tierra has worked hard to secure a good image among its fans, and we wouldn't want to tarnish that image just because of Wookie's problems with the bottle. Perhaps I've said too much, already. :)

- Who is the father? This is a question you have been getting a lot in the forums. Do you plan to make him return in future KQ games/remakes?

Wookie: He'll return in a novel, most likely. I honestly don't know if the AGDs want to do a game. If they ask me to design one, I will!

- Would you like to mention some of the best easter eggs that were not included in the original?

Wookie: The hole-in-rock, which was the last scene to be written in the game. And there's a very popular one in the 'tests'.

AGD2: I've always liked the movie-related easter eggs. If you look hard enough, you can find references from 'Gone with the Wind' to 'Star Trek', and anything in between!

- Was the puzzle where you have to choose the right fairy tales a new puzzle that you came up with or was it included in the original? Some people thought this was the most difficult of all puzzles.

Wookie: New puzzle. Blame AGD2. He modified my original puzzle, and made it far more challenging. I like it, personally.

AGD2: Don't blame me… blame the gnome with the spinning wheel! He always manages to creep his way into the most difficult puzzle in the game.

- I also thoroughly enjoyed the ability to swap cursors with the mouse roller. Who thought of that innovation?

AGD2: It's a standard AGS feature. Any game created with the engine can utilize it. Hats off to Chris Jones for this one!

Music / Sound

- Are there any chances that there is going to be a voice pack produced for KQ2?

Wookie: Don't hold your breath. There would be a LOT of lines to sift through.

- One of the members in your forums proposed that third parties could try to make a voice pack, then send it to you and then you could decide if it would be good enough for KQ2 or not. What do you think about that?

AGD2: While this idea sounds great in theory, the majority of the work would still fall upon us supervising the project, editing the new scripting for voices to fit in and what not. Taking this into consideration, it would probably be faster for us to produce a voice pack by ourselves than to have a third party create one. But we feel that the time could be put to better use on another project. A voice pack could take an additional 6 months.

- The music of the game was very professional. Has Tom Lewandowski worked on the music of another game before?

Tom: RTS was the first 'game soundtrack' Dianne and I have had the opportunity to work on. We've composed music for non-gaming 'stories' in the past, and a couple of radio commercial situations, but nothing of this magnitude. A game soundtrack was something we've wanted to do ever since either one of us first heard music playing in a computer game! We greatly appreciated the AGD's trust in us to handle the job and provide this wonderful opportunity. It was the perfect motive -- since we've always loved the Sierra adventure game genre.

- Why did you use OGG vobis format instead of MP3s? Are they better in quality?

Tom: After extensive testing between sound formats, we decided on Ogg's "Vorbis" format for several reasons. First of all, Adventure Game Studio handles them better than MP3; Ogg files aren't as taxing on the game's engine and cause fewer playback problems than MP3's. Ogg is an open source system, meaning, no licensing is required to use the format. And Ogg's compression creates smaller file sizes than MP3, and we feel the quality exceeds that of the MP3 format too.

- The song of Little Miss Muffet in the end sequence was great. Why does Little Miss Muffet want to stay anonymous?

Wookie: So she doesn't get recognised in the shower.

Tom: She's wanted by the KGB and FBI. I'm afraid we can't tell you more than that...or we'd have to kill you.

AGD2: Because I… er, I mean she doesn't want the extra attention! :)

-Is she going to sing for future productions of Tierra?

Wookie: Who knows?!

Tom: I certainly hope so!

Future:

QFG2:
- Is everybody who worked on KQ2 remake going to work for QFG2 also? Is there someone new coming in?

Wookie: I have a few suggestions, but otherwise I'm on my laurels for this one!

AGD2: I'd say it looks that way! As for new members, we haven't decided that yet. The only people we'd likely need for new projects are artists and animators, but it's yet to be seen if we can comfortably complete all the necessary tasks by ourselves without it becoming too much of a burden on our small team.

- How much will the remake differ from the original one (interface, puzzles, story, combat, map, a new class maybe, cutscenes)?

AGD2: Not very much at all. The alleyways will be easier to navigate, possibly in the form of an overhead map. We're also planning on including some easter eggs that were intended for the original game but had to be dropped due to lack of storage space on the diskettes. The interface will resemble QFG1VGA's, the combat system is undecided at this stage, and the puzzles will all remain exactly the same. No new puzzles or quests will be added. No new classes will be featured other than the ones seen in the original game. We most likely won't have any 3D cutscenes. QFG2VGA will be more of a literal remake of the SCI version like KQ1VGA was. QFG2 does not need fleshing out and we feel that doing so would only harm it. A few minor details might be edited for consistency with later games in the series… but other than that you'll know what to expect if you've played the SCI version before.

- Is there going to be a voice pack for QFG2?

No, most likely not.

- What about the music? Are you going to use original tunes from the QFG series? Are you going to produce an extensive soundtrack again?

Tom: The soundtrack for QFG2 VGA will be a very enhanced version of Chris Brayman's music, which was originally composed for the game. It's hard to improve on such a wonderful score, but there are many opportunities to embellish it further.

- Is there going to be a demo released before the final release?

AGD2: The Tierra philosophy on demos is that they're unnecessary for non-profit, fan-made games. The main purpose of a demo is to sell a commercial product to potential customers by giving them a sneak preview of what they'll be spending their cash on. Since Tierra is not selling or making any money from these games, a demo would only serve to delay the final product. Oh, I guess you just wanted the short answer? Ok… no :)

- Why did you decide to not enhance QFG2 as much as you did with KQ2?

Wookie: QFG2 has an exceptionally strong plot. No enhancement of that sort required. ('Cept for one tiny, tiny little detail... for consistency, you understand.)

AGD2: As I mentioned above, enhancements would likely do the game more harm than good. While the initial novelty and wow-factor would probably impress people, they'd soon catch onto things that just don't feel right. The score is one thing that comes to mind, as is the general plot. We want to do this game justice and keep it faithful to the rest of the QFG series. By respecting the flow of the original plot we don't risk messing things up. QFG2 is a fairly complex game and I'm sure that the Coles included everything that was intended to be included to tell the story and have it reach the proper conclusion.

- You were all guest stars in the wedding in the end of KQ2. Are you going to star in QFG2 also?

Wookie: I'd love to make a cameo. I enjoyed my time on the set of KQ2VGA (though I don't remember a great deal of it).

AGD2: I hear that Shapeir is a much hotter than Kolyma - so we'll have to wait and see about that. (I don't tan well, and burn easily)

Tierra
- Can you tell us some of your plans for the future?

Wookie: I'm going to England, to play Voldemort in the fourth Harry Potter movie. Well ok, not really. But I'd LOVE to! I'd be paid to appear out of a big cauldron... nude!

AGD1: I'm going to DISNEYLAND! Oh wait, been there, done that, of course would like to do it again...but, I have bigger and better things awaiting me in Australia. I'll be moving there in January.

AGD2: I'm going on a quest, which will take me all over the world, to single-handedly smoke terrorists out of their holes, wherever they might be hiding... Well... actually, I probably won't have time, with all the work that needs to be done on our future releases!

- Are you planning to release only remakes or are you thinking of starting your own adventures?

Wookie: <looking up from his writing notebook> Huh? Wha?

AGD2: Tierra will most likely only do remakes. Any original games would probably be released under another label.

- You said in the 4th newsletter that you have been offered jobs from professional game companies. Is there any chance we might see a game where one of the AGD has contributed. Can you tell us which companies they were?

AGD2: There were a few, but I'm not sure of the company names anymore… we don't have the emails. One was an offer for a job creating commercial adventure games for the Gameboy Advance. Another was an offer from a programmer at Id

Software who offered to assist us in making a commercial adventure game if we ever got around to it.

- Is there any chance that you are going to become a commercial company and start selling your products?

AGD2: Not under the Tierra banner.

- What do you think about the future of AGS (Adventure Game Studio) and its potential? How much powerful can it become?

AGD2: AGS is a fantastic engine and I think the potential for it to become successful is very high. Up to this point, most people are just making small free games with it. While some are quite complex, few have reached near the full potential of the engine. It takes a long time to learn all the features of AGS, but a commercial game is definitely possible to create - with a lot of time and effort! The creator of the engine is constantly adding new features, so AGS will only get more powerful with time. A lot of exciting features have been implemented already and there's probably more to come!

- You said in your latest newsletter that one of the AGD moved from the USA to Australia in order to produce adventures faster and more efficient. What will be the major effects and differences caused by this move?

Wookie: I'll get to harass them both on the phone.

AGD2: Definitely! We will be able to work much more closely on things and get them done faster, without delay or interruptions. Living on opposite sides of the world means that one person is always up while the other is sleeping. This has always made it very tricky to get our schedules to coincide – and even when they do, our working time is limited. Motivation levels are also increased being able to work in person.

AGD1: Time, motivation, and communication are all of the utmost importance in game making, and will all be majorly increased through direct contact. And screw phone harassment, Wookie -- if I move halfway across the world, you might as well do it in person. I'd like to see you make fun of my ridiculous hammerhead hide-ho sharkee concept sketch to my face!

- Are you thinking of recruiting more members in the development team?

AGD2: Maybe in the future, but there are no immediate plans to do this. Artists are the only people we might be interested in adding at this stage.

- What would you think if someone from the old Sierra team (like Al Lowe or Roberta Williams) wanted to offer some help in one of your projects by giving you advice?

Wookie: Advice is always welcome, regardless of the source. (So long as Roberta Williams doesn't come after me with anything sharp.)

AGD2: Several ex-Sierra employees have contacted us and given us words of encouragement on the remakes. Thankfully, all have seemed to like them so far!

- Are all your future releases going to use the AGS engine or are you thinking of producing your own engine sometime in the future?

AGD2: We're happy sticking with AGS. No point in reinventing the wheel just for the sake of being able to call it our own, especially when there are no other real advantages to doing so.

Other:

- What do you think of the current state of adventure gaming?

Wookie: It's struggling, but it's still there. Just.

AGD2: It's in poor shape at the moment.

- What do you think has to happen for adventures to return in the forefront of gaming?

Wookie: Kids and teenagers hooked of 3D shooters and RPG's could all wake up one day, demanding something else. Seriously, it won't return to the forefront, but it can still creep a little closer.

AGD2: I think the popularity of different game genres goes in and out… it's a phase. Remember those Scooters that every kid and his mother used to own about two years ago? Why don't we see very many of them around these days? Because the novelty wore off, that's why! I have to admit that I was initially impressed with 3D games and their capabilities, but now I see too much similarity between them all. To be blunt, they're boring. Hopefully, the rest of the earth's population will catch onto this fact soon and they too will want a taste of something new.

It's chiefly the game companies' marketing departments that are responsible for this situation. You've got your average guy in a suit who doesn't know the first thing about playing games - but he does know a heck of a lot about exploiting an industry and milking it for every dollar he can! Unfortunately, this is the psychology of nearly every marketing type person in the gaming industry these days. Every big game company has such marketing type people running the show, dictating what we're going to buy, and thus what we're going to play. If it's not 3D, then players aren't going to give it the time of day. If it doesn't have bucket-loads of gore, then kids will think it's boring. It's unfortunate that these marketing types have such a narrow-minded method of thinking, as it only serves to perpetuate the vicious cycle of the development and sales for 3D action games. After all, how can we make it clear to them that we are willing to BUY adventure games if they're not allowing any to be made and released for sale?

The bottom line is that marketing types don't care about what gamers want. They care about money and they're not willing to take the risk of creating something different that could drastically effect sales figures. They're completely happy to sit in their comfort zone where they know they'll continue to rake in millions of dollars by releasing the same old tired 3D clones. But you can understand this logic… if all companies are out to make money, and 3D games are good for that then why change a winning formula? Until the 3D/Action genre is seriously threatened by the sales figures of adventure genre, I don't think the situation will change.

What needs to be done is that a company who is passionate about adventure games, and adventure games ALONE needs to step into the arena and start selling them again, not just a few -- but tons of them! Hopefully, that's what we intend to do… give people a choice in the matter instead of forcing them to jump

on the same bandwagon which the marketing types want them to jump on. Variety is the spice of life, but there needs to be an active adventure game genre to support for people to make their opinions heard. Once adventure games get out there in the arena again and people start buying them, I think the focus could easily shift back. It's all about taking control away from the marketing guys and letting the players decide what they want to buy. A difficult task, but I still believe it to be possible to achieve.

AGD1: Haba na haba hujaza kibaba--Swahili proverb, translated: "doing things a little at a time will get you to where you want to be." Call me blindly optimistic, but I think with enough hard work and dedication, everything is possible. Same goes for bringing adventure games back into the forefront of gaming; continually taking baby step after baby step can bring about impressive results in the long run. There's a long way to go, but there is a destination in sight--and with that being said, it's possible to reach it.

Tom: Pass. You don't want to hear my comments on this.... trust me.

- You have cancelled two projects so far. One of them was royal quest and the other one was Space Quest 2 remake (which was more famous as the secret project). Can you tell us the reasons for this?

AGD2: Royal Quest was cancelled because it was not shaping up to be the humorous game that we intended it to be. It was growing more and more offensive, so we scrapped it. Space Quest 2 VGA was cancelled because it came to our attention that another person was already working on a SQ2VGA project, and we didn't think it was a good thing to have two versions encroaching on each other.

- Is there any chance that you are going to get back to these projects or are they gone forever?

AGD2: Royal Quest is gone. Space Quest 2 VGA could be resumed if the other project is ever cancelled, but this is probably unlikely to happen.

- One of the books in the library of Kolyma has the title: Chronicling the Longest Journey (or 'How to Sustain a Compelling Story When Your Lead Character Sound Like an Airhead'). Any comments on that?

Wookie: Ummmm... nope!

- In the same place some boxes are labelled Leisure Suit Larry 4: The Missing Floppies. When I read this I remembered that there was no LSL 4 and I am wandering if it could be a potential title among your remakes. Do you think it would be possible?

AGD2: No, Al Lowe has stressed on many occasions that there's not supposed to be a Larry 4. Making one just doesn't seem right if it goes against the designer's point of view. If the designer doesn't agree with it, then how can it feel like an authentic Larry game? The title in the KQ2 library was just a joke.

- You have developed 2 great adventures so far with AGS. Is there something about game development that you wish you knew from the beginning that you didn't know then? Do you have any advice to give to the rest of the independent developers?

Wookie: It takes LOADS of time! If you have little or no patience, then don't bother. Seriously! Also, if you're putting together a team, I strongly believe you need no more than a single writer (though a married one is okay) to handle the plot / dialogue. Others could be utilised for the incidental text, of which there is usually a great deal (and my least favourite of the writing task). However, try to avoid to "too many cooks in the kitchen" syndrome.

AGD2: In retrospect, I wish I had gotten someone to double check all the spelling and grammar errors in the text ***before*** inserting them into the game! Fixing these errors in the beta testing process has been a very monotonous and tedious job! But it could have easily been avoided. There have been many other situations where I've slapped myself on the forehead after scripting or animating something and then discovered a much more simpler and efficient way to do exactly the same thing in far less time… but I think these are all part of a necessary learning process. Trial and error is what

helps people become more experienced at things. If you don't make mistakes then you can't learn anything from them. So my advice is: don't be discouraged by things that can go wrong or by people who try to put you off. Perseverance will reward you in the end.

- A totally irrelevant question…on your new website you have a map. Which country's is this map? It looks very similar to Greece.

AGD2: Several emails that we've received from sharp-eyed citizens of Greece have confirmed that the map is in fact… Greece!

- Is there anything more you would like to add?

Wookie: I'm personally very thankful of the feedback on our forums, both positive and critically constructive. There are many out there who care about what we do and about adventure games in general. Hopefully, certain companies will see the response that Tierra and other such projects are receiving, and realise that adventure games are still viable products to market.

AGD2: Probably, but now that you asked… I've drawn a blank! Thanks to everyone who's posted long 'Thank you' threads on the forums telling us how much they like the game. I sometimes feel bad that we don't have time to reply to them. But rest assured, we've read every single one of them and really appreciate the positive feedback! So if anyone has made such a post and was disappointed that it might have sunk to the bottom of the forum without us seeing it, trust me... we've read it and we really appreciated the time you took to write it!

AGD1: Ditto to AGD2's comment! The kind people who take their valuable time to give us positive feedback is appreciated more than they know. I'd just like to say thank you.

FROGWARES
(www.frogwares.com)

One of the most promising adventures right now in the makings is Journey to the Center of the Earth by Frogwares. The Inventory conducts an interview this month with Serge Geraschenko, project co-ordinator of Journey to the Center of the Earth, and Wael Amr, CEO of Frogwares to shed some light in the details of this new adventure game.

Thank you a lot for accepting to conduct this interview with The Inventory. Journey to the Center of the Earth sure looks very promising and the readers must be anxious to know more about it so let's get on with the questions.

Yourselves

- Can you tell us a little bit about yourselves?

Frogwares LTD is an independent developer, based in France, Ireland and Ukraine (development branch). We released our first game (Sherlock Holmes: Mystery of the Mummy) about two moths ago.

- Have you played any adventures recently (except from your own)? If yes then which ones are your favorites?

Nautilus, Myst, Dracula 2, Syberia.

- What do you think about the current state of adventure gaming and what do you think has to happen for adventures to become more popular?

As long as among people playing video games will be players preferring quality graphics to dynamics, solving puzzles to killing monsters, adventure games will exist!!! What we see that good adventure games are in demand, and there is an important community of adventure gamers. Actually in my opinion, it is the friendliest game community I have seen.

Story
- Tell us a little bit about the story of the game.

Ariane, a young photographer, working for a big travel magazine, takes pictures from a bird's-eye view of Iceland. The helicopter flies upon volcano Sneffles, a heavy whirlwind shakes it: Ariane falls down from the machine, before the latter shatters on the surface about ten meters further.

The young woman rolls and lands in a torrent that plunges into the crack in the earth. Arian is carried away with the stream, she faints…She comes to her senses lying on a beach, in the "Centre of the Earth".

She will discover a lost world where two civilizations, once very developed, are striving to survive. This incredibly beautiful universe hides a terrible secret, which Ariane will discover very soon…

- You said that the game will be based on the book of Jules Verne called Journey to the center of the earth. What kind of similarities should we expect with the book (characters, storyline, locations)?

We use only the idea that there is something down there. We completely invented our storyline; however some locations will be similar. Action will take place in our time but from time to time we will refer to the first expedition described by Jules Verne.

- Is the story going to be linear or will there be multiple branches that the player can follow depending on their actions?

Mostly it will be linear, but within level, the player will not be limited to some unique procedure.

- You are currently running a project along with Just Adventure called the "Journey to the Center of the Game" where the JA forum members can provide you with ideas for storyline or heroes that could be included in the final game. What I am wondering is whether you have completed the whole storyline already and thinking of complementing it with the results of this project or if you wait for the results of this project in order to build up and finish the story.

It is a very good question. Our idea was to involve adventurers in the creation of our new game since its beginning. That is why we launched "Journey to the Center of the Game" in the same time we began creation of level 1. We encourage players to invent locations, stories, propose episodes, and describe their secondary NPC. The main framework of game design is already done, but we leave some gaps. We have a game designer in our team so we can always change anything; we pay a lot of attention to what gamers tell us on sites. In any case we are making the game not for internal use, but for you!

- Tell us a little bit about the main character, Ariane.

She is a young lady, very intelligent and nice, ambitious and a bit superficial in the beginning. However, players will be able to observe how Ariane and her inner world will evolve during game. She can be compassionate and ready to sacrifice herself for … hmmm you will see, though.

- I have to say that there are some striking similarities of Ariane with two recent adventure heroines, April Ryan and Kate Walker. They all have quite athletic bodies, middle-length dark hair and they wear tight clothes. Aren't you afraid of creating a stereotype? Will Ariane's personality differ from the other two characters and if so in what way?

Maybe you can describe appearance of a RT model in three lines, but not a personality of our main character. You will have to play the whole game. I tell you, you will be really moved by Ariane. She will have very unique characteristics, which will not allow you to mix her up with someone else.

- As I said you are not the first one to use a woman as a lead character. We've recently had Atlantis 3, Longest Journey, Syberia that starred a female protagonist and Legacy that is coming up will have also a woman as a main character. Do you think male leads don't suit adventure games?

Statistics say that about 80% of our customers are female. Personally I felt very comfortable playing female characters. I think female characters suits very good to adventure games.

Graphics
- Is the game going to be viewed from the 1st person perspective or from the 3rd person perspective?

It will be 3rd person perspective with zoom screens in 1st person. We try not to make static backgrounds but to add as more life as possible (waterfalls, surf, moving creatures, etc…)

- What kind of graphics engine will the game use and what resolutions will it reach?

We use "Flat Flux FW" our internal development providing stunning quality of graphics and taking maximum out of our high-polygonal models and textures drawn by professional artists from the academy of Art of Ukraine. The best resolution is 1024*768.

- Will there be a lot of cutscenes used throughout the game?

30-40 high quality cut scenes and animation movies, 15 minutes in total. 2-3 minutes are already made. They are very important in the adventures games.
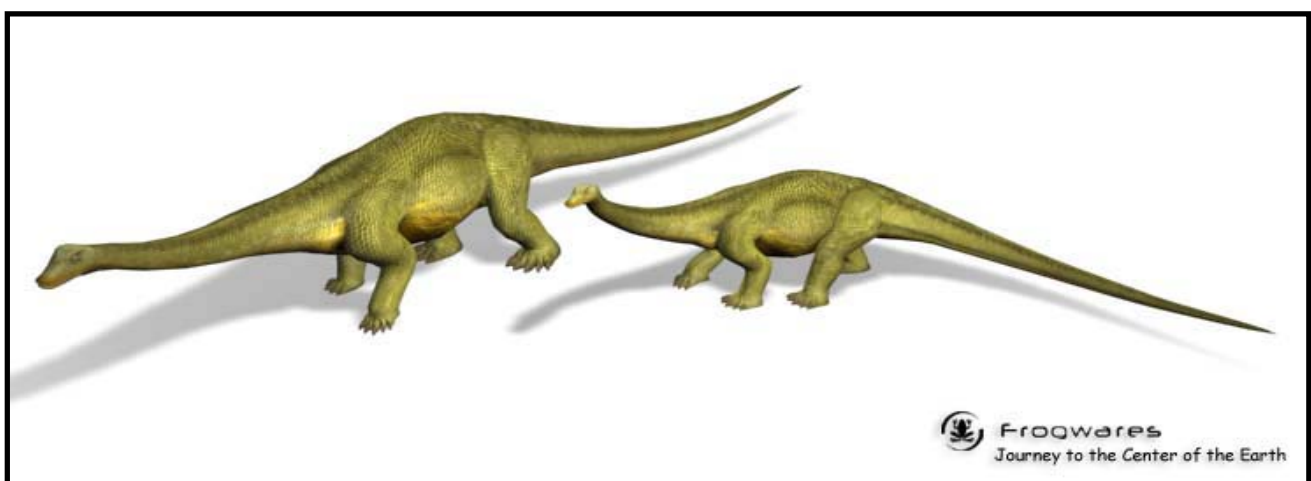
Gameplay

- Is Journey to the center of the earth going to be a point and click adventure?

Exactly, apparently it is the best solution for adventures games.

- Approximately how many characters should we expect to meet and how many locations to visit?

30 characters to meet and to interact with. 6-7 adventure areas per level, 2-3 sets per area, 2-5 views by sets 200-300 views in the whole game.

- How many hours will an average player need to finish it?

25-30 h of gameplay

Soldier

Froqwares
Journey to the Center of the Earth

- Can you describe the interface of the game?

It is to be done, but I can tell you that it will be easy to use, initiative.

- Can you describe some of the puzzles you are planning to use for the game? For example are you planning to use inventory-based puzzles, or pulling-levers/moving-tiles kind of puzzles? Are they going to be easy or difficult in general?

We will have types, very logics and fun! We are already testing them on our team and families, (children, wives, grand parents, etc), to be sure that most people will enjoy solving them.

- What kind of technique are you going to use for the dialogues?

We will use the classical variant: it will be multiple-choice dialogs.

- Will Ariane make comments on the objects and people she encounters like April Ryan in The Longest Journey or will she be silent like Kate Walker in Syberia?

She will make comments as Sherlock Holmes in our last game. I advise you to try it
http://www.frogwares.com/sherlock/kindex.php

Music
- What kind of music are you planning to use for the game?

We have a musician who wrote music for Sherlock, and received only positive feedback from players. It will be calm ambience background music, relaxing player, creating atmosphere of adventure.

- Do you know approximately how much time will the soundtracks last?

Not less than 15 minutes in total.

- Is the game going to be released in English everywhere or is it going to be translated in other languages also?

Sherlock's already translated into 7 languages, I think "Journey to the center of the Earth " will have even better coverage.

General
- When do you expect the game to be ready for release? Are you planning for a worldwide release or are you going to have different release dates for each region? If so when should we be expecting it here in the Nordic Region (Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark, Iceland)?

We are going to release it in fall 2003. Release schedule is to be set up!

- When will we be able to see a demo of the game?

We already have a technical demo, but we will make a demo for broad public with all features (interface, animation, sounds, music etc). It will take more time, but we do not want to spoil the first impression of the game. We expect to release it in February.

- It is quite hard to promote adventure games nowadays. However there are a couple of adventure companies that have managed to place their games among the best selling titles in the game stores. What kind of promotion techniques are you thinking of using for Journey to the Center of the Earth?

We use two forums "Journey to the Center of the Game", news updated on our web site, newsletters; we are going to launch a new web site for this game only very soon.

We welcome journalists and do not save time on replying interviews. We pay personal attention to every email we receive. I wish I could reply all my emails right away, but most of them come in the night, we have 8-9 hours difference with America. Frogwares is known for being prompt and very responsive.

- How many CDs will the game come in? Do you have any plans for a DVD-version?

We expect to have the game on one CD, but we will see… For a DVD version, it is too early to talk.

- Will this be the last adventure with Ariane or is possible that there might be a sequel for Journey to the Center of the Earth?

I think that decision to make a sequel should be taken based on results of sales, feedback from gamers. I do not like scenarios created specially to make sequel. You can surely make a gap, or leave something that will help to link both scenarios, but not to divide plot in episodes.

- Can you talk to us about Frogwares? When was it founded, where are its headquarters, how many people are working for Frogwares etc?

Frogwares was founded in April 2000 in Ireland by Wael Amr and Pascal Ensenat, two French people, Ukrainian and French branches were opened very soon after. Most of development and creation is done in Ukrainian branch in Kiev. Since the beginning the objective was to make games, however we had several projects of different application development, it allowed us to build a strong team of programmers. Now they develop engines for our games. Sherlock was our first released game, we have also several games, but their development it suspended as we are focusing on "Journey to the Center of the Earth" now, but in case we find resources we will continue to make them.

- Would you like to describe in short your other adventure game called 'Sherlock Holmes: Mystery of the Mummy' and tell us if there are any plans for release in the Nordic Region?

Sherlock Holmes, the famous detective is going to solve a mystery. Elisabeth Montcalfe, who is going to marry his distant cousin, begs him for help. Her father disappeared some time ago. Scotland Yard investigated the case and reported that, according to the evidence they found in the manor, Lord Montcalfe killed himself by self-immolation.

His daughter refuses to believe this conclusion. In her heart, she still believes that her father is alive. Sherlock Holmes accepts her invitation to visit Lord Montcalfe's manor to begin his inquiry. The Manor is full of traps and secrets. Compelled to go forward, the detective struggles to the heart of the sanctuary, which is protected by Egyptian magic…

General Engineer

Froqwares
Journey to the Center of the Earth
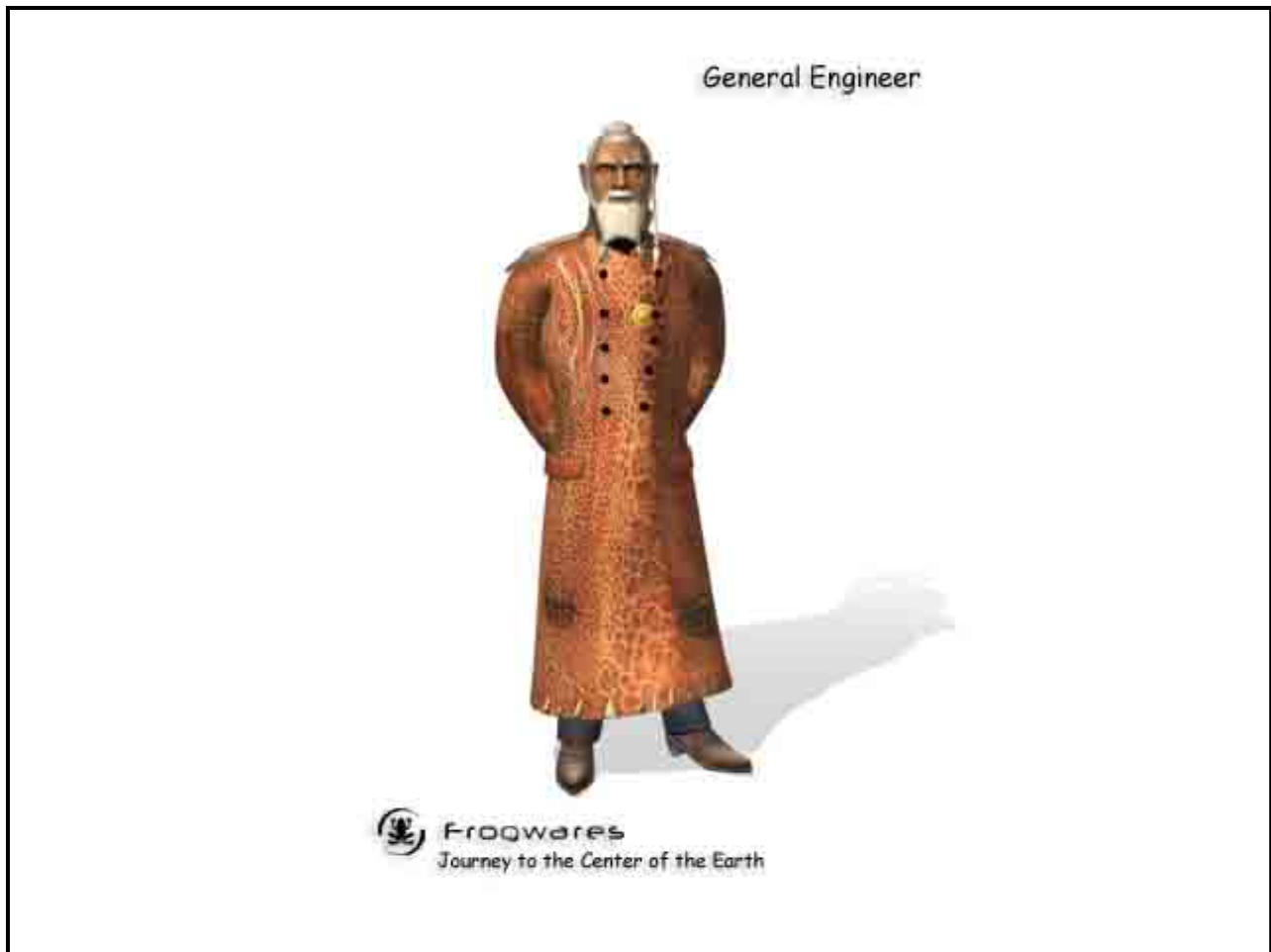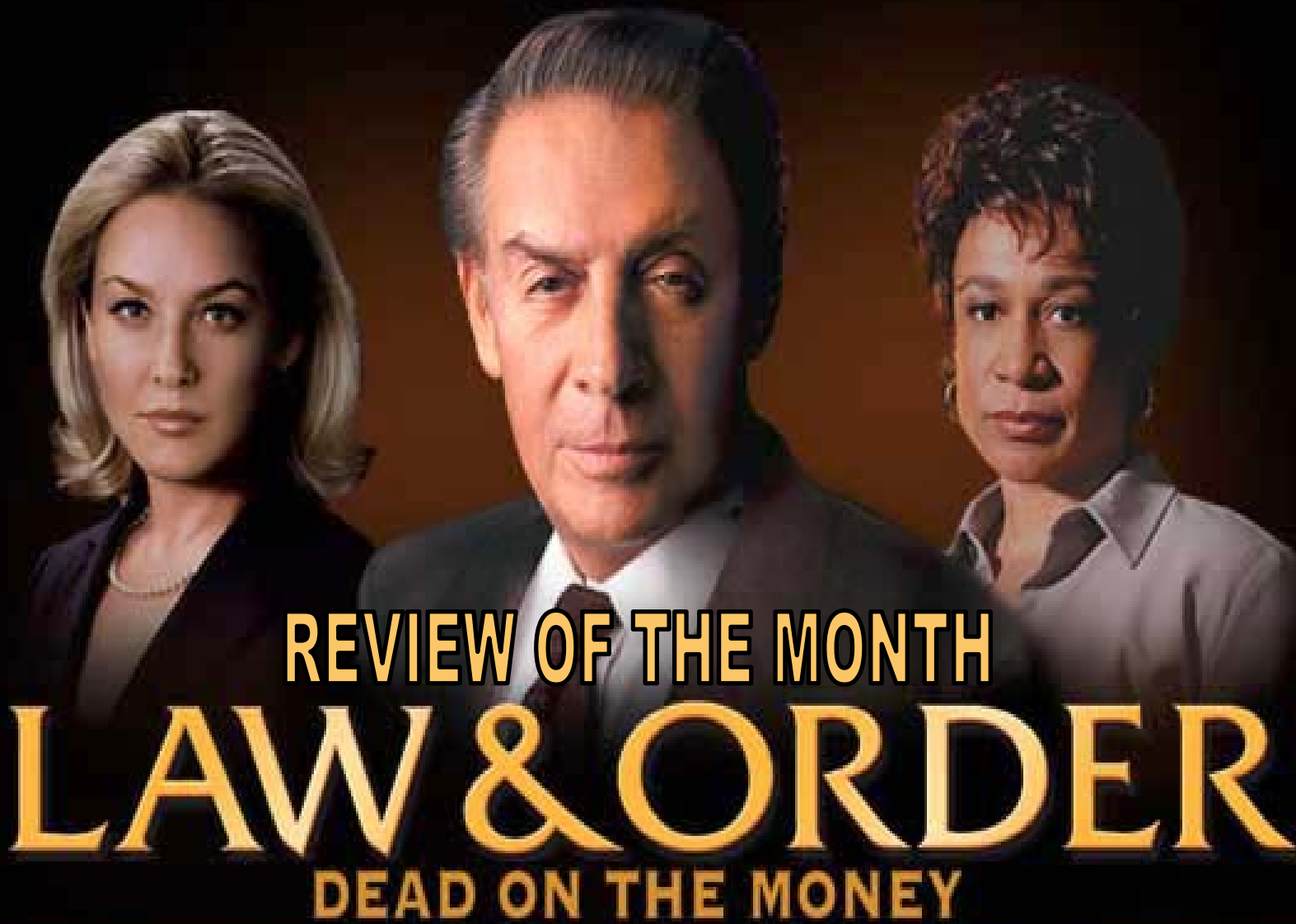
The game is being distributed by Wanadoo, and they will release it in the Nordic region too. It is scheduled for January -February 2003. For those of you who can't wait, you can order it on our site and we will send it to you directly.

- Are you thinking of releasing more adventure games in the future?

Sure, we like these games and have a lot of fun making them. So I do not see any reason in stopping to make them. However we would not like to limit our company to adventure games only, we have talented people experienced in RTS, who work on the project called "Delenda".

- Would you like to add anything more?

Just want to thank all adventure gamers for their support, encouraging posts on forums and emails. We appreciate it very much.

REVIEW OF THE MONTH

LAW & ORDER
DEAD ON THE MONEY

The review of the month for January is the 1st person adventure from Legacy Interactive based on the TV series Law and Order. This game had a great potential, a name of a famous series, professional voice-overs and the script was written by one of the writers of the famous TV series. But did it take full advantage of these features finally?

Story: In Law & Order you will take control of a detective in the first half of the game, and of an assistant district attorney in the second half. There has been a murder in Central Park of New York. You (the detective) and detective Lennie Briscoe are being called to the crime scene. From that point you have to find who is the killer and find at the same time enough evidence that will allow you to produce an arrest warrant. When the suspect is
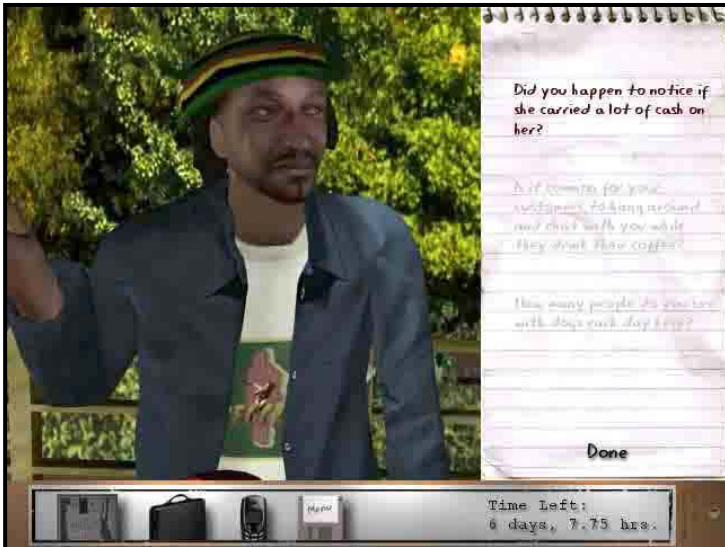
brought into custody, then the second half of the game begins. At this point you take the role of the assistant district attorney and you have to convince the jury that the defendant is guilty by providing sufficient evidence and calling witnesses to testify in court.

The story is the strongest point of the game. It shows that it was written by a professional writer. As you progress through the investigation you will be suspicious of several people and you will jump into different conclusions as new evidence comes up to the surface. And we might have played the investigator/detective role before in other adventures, but playing a lawyer in court is definitely a new experience for almost all adventurers. It is a very original idea and hopefully it will be used again.

The characters are quite interesting and so are the dialogues. One of the best points of the story is that you get to see in a way how it would be to study the life of a deceased person, to get to know all her habits, her friends and enemies, and her personal secrets. I actually felt quite awkward when I was looking in photo albums and personal items while I was investigating the house of the victim. This is a great achievement of the game, since it has not been so often that adventures awake feelings in you.

Graphics: In graphics the game also does quite good. The 3D models of all the characters are very detailed and the ones that were taken from inside the actual series are similar to their real counterparts. The several rooms that you have to investigate are also very nicely depicted. There are several small touches that make you feel like you are really there.

However the graphics have a couple of flaws. I did not found aesthetic at all the fact that there was always a big notepad covering the half of the screen everytime you talked to someone. It seemed really unrealistic since I do not think that any detective puts his notepad just in front of the

Law and Order
Dead on the money

Developer: **Legacy Interactive**
Category: **Point and click**
Perspective: **1st person**
Difficulty: **Medium/Hard**
Site: **www.lawandordergame.com**

Where to buy it:
www.webhallen.com

other person's face while asking them questions.

Apart from that, the fact that you never get to see the character you are controlling is also quite irritating. Furthermore there is use again of the outdated slideshow engine for the investigation scenes with no transition animation between steps. But all these minor drawbacks are overshadowed from the fact that L&O uses some of the best 3D models ever used in adventures. The only 3D models that could compete with L&O would be those of Atlantis 3 and Syberia.

Sound: The voices of the game are also among the best ever used in adventures so far. The acting is superb. Elizabeth Röhm did a superb job as the assistant distric attorney Serena Southerlyn. Others that did an excellent job were Pat Musick as Laurie Russ, Jeffrey Meek as Bart Corchran, Daryl Brown as Bobby Sloan and Kath Soucie as Kathleen McDonell.

The music on the other hand is not of the same high standard as the voices. Not necessarily bad tunes, but nothing exciting. The only track I can remember was the one in the victim's residence, as the others did not make such an impression on me. Well let's do a summary. The game has a well crafted storyline, great graphics and

some very impressive acting. Wouldn't it be great if it also had a great…

Gameplay: Yes, it would! But it does not unfortunately. And now I have to mention that there are two different versions of that game. There is the version of the game that you play as it

comes in its box, and there is the other version of the game, which is what you play after you download a patch from the game's website. The difference between the two version is a time limit that you have to complete your investigation, before you loose the game.

Well, let's put it like that. The time limit in the unpatched version goes by before you can say 'you have the right to remain silent'. The time that the game gives you is incredibly small and the most chances are that you are going to replay the whole first half at least two or three times before you can manage to accomplish your goal. The problem with it is that time passes with every action you take.

So if you look at an object that is not necessary for your mission, then you loose some precious time. If you make the mistake and send it even to the lab for analysis or research you loose even more time. And since in the beginning you do not know which objects are necessary and which are not, and there are hundreds of objects to pick up during the game, the probability that you are going to run out of time is something more than high.

If you download the patch from the game's site it will slow down ten times the timer, hence making the game much more feasible to complete. This has two drawbacks though. One is that you are forced to use the efficiency skill for your detective in order for the patch to work. You choose two out of four skills in the beginning of the game.

The four skills are Team Work (you get hints by your boss through sms or on the chalkboard), Efficiency (slows down the timer), Evidence (if you don't choose it then the cursor will not turn into a magnifying glass when passed over a hotspot) and Interview (where the wrong questions are left out of the interviews). So you are

left only with three skills to choose. Since leaving out the evidence skill gives a new meaning to the term 'pixel-hunting' you are actually forced to use these two skills.

The other drawback of the patched version goes down to 'killing time' in order to proceed the game. This happens because in many points of the game you will need to get results back from research or tests from the crime lab, and for these tests or research studies to be carried out, time needs to pass. And since the timer goes really slow now, you will find yourselves going through your inventory items over and over again or walking through rooms without reason just to make time pass. Even though there are these two drawbacks, the patched version is way better than the unpatched one that is nearly impossible to solve.

The choice of skills in the beginning is another drawback of the game. It would be more appropriate to have all these skills and not have to choose one of them. Especially the team work skill is a very helpful skill that takes you out of difficult situations when you do not have a clue what to do next.

In a game like L&O information and evidence is something that is of high importance. And unfortunately they are both badly organized in L&O. The inventory holds around 50 items, and in the game you can collect hundreds of different items, that at the point when you collect them, you have no idea whether they are going to be useful or not. Since though you do not have enough space you always have to throw away most of them, and it might happen that you might throw an item that will be necessary either in the investigation or during court, in order to complete the game. There is no way to regain an item after you throw it away. Except from that, the inventory does not re-organize itself when you throw away an item, so after some time in the game, your inventory will probably look like a mess and it is cumbersome to locate evidence or specific items.

System Requirements:

Windows 95/98/Me/2000/XP

Pentium II 400 MHZ

96 MB RAM

700MB HARD DISK

DIRECTX SOUNDCARD

DIRECTX VIDEO CARD

In general L&O can throw the player in a lot of dead ends, and it might do that without even the player understanding it at all, but instead continue playing until he/she sees the 'game over' screen.

Other bad features of L&O's gameplay is that it usually does not allow you to re-interview people apart from a couple of exceptions, and sometimes you have no clue as to what to do next.

L&O gameplay has some good aspects also. I found the trial very entertaining, and it was very exciting to shout objection everytime the defense was crossing the line. I was actually half-shouting objection in my room. It is very immersive and very realistic in that part. And if you exclude the bad aesthetics of the dialogue screens, the questions you can ask are rather fun to choose and sometimes will puzzle you as to what you have to ask next. With the evidence skill chosen, most items are clearly identifiable and you will not have to resort to pixel hunting.
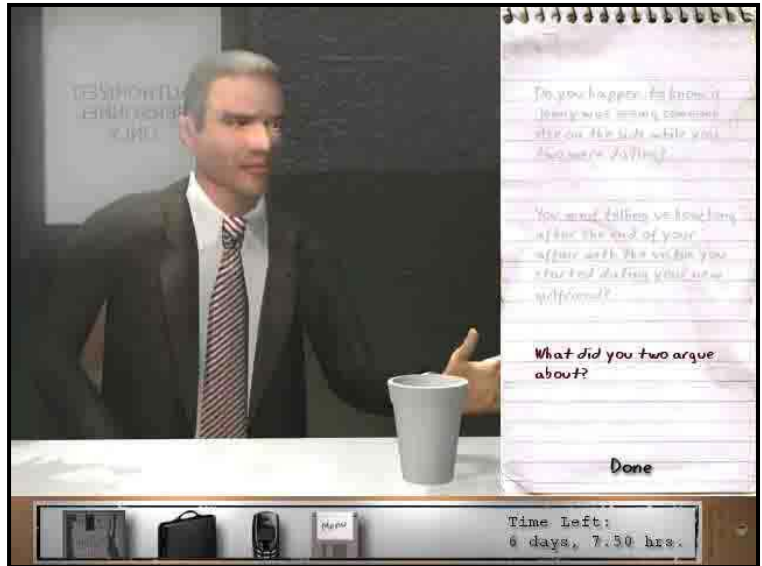
General info: The game comes in one of those new mini-boxes (Syberia style) and the version that is available in the Nordic Region contains 3 CDs. There is another version of the game, which is newer, contains 2 CDs and has the patch already installed, but this is not the version that is sold here. I encountered a couple of bugs with the game. First of all sometimes the screen would go totally black and I had to restart the game to continue. Apart from that, if you install the game in a different folder than the one that the game suggests the patch will not work. By checking the Law & Order forums it seems like there are many people having technical problems with the game.

In a few words… Law and Order could have been a great classic adventure, but instead it was a great concept with slightly bad execution. Technically perfect, with great graphics/voice overs and a professional plot, but quite bad in terms of gameplay. It is however the only game that gives you the chance to take the role of a lawyer in action inside a court room. The game that comes out of the box, the unpatched version, is mediocre to bad, because it does not give the player a lot of chances for success, while the patched version is a quite good game with some flaws.

Un-patched Version   *Patched Version*
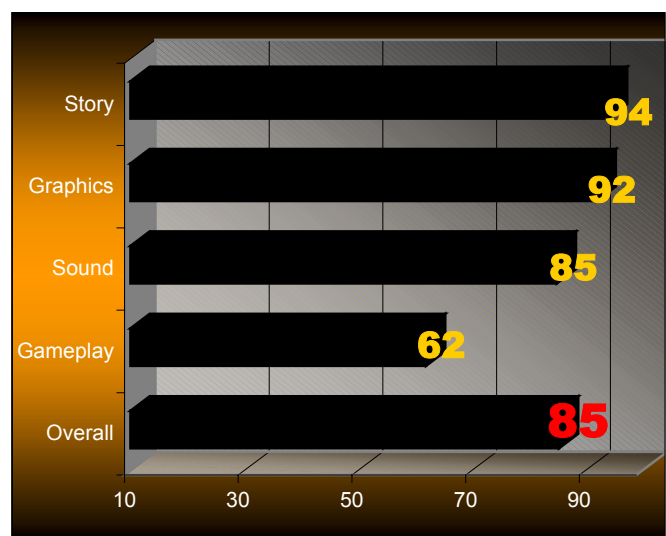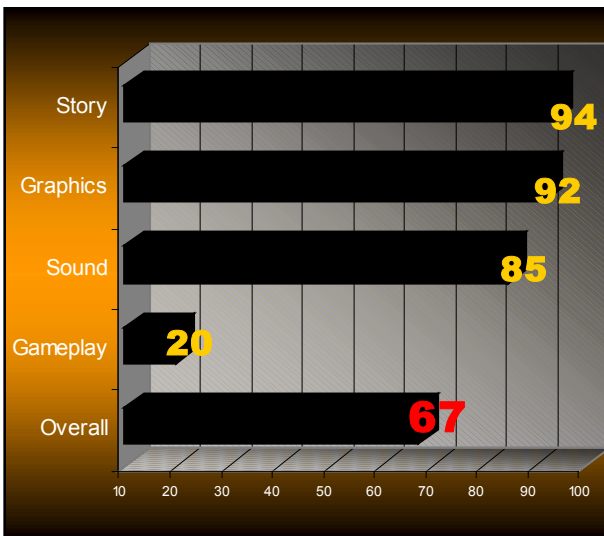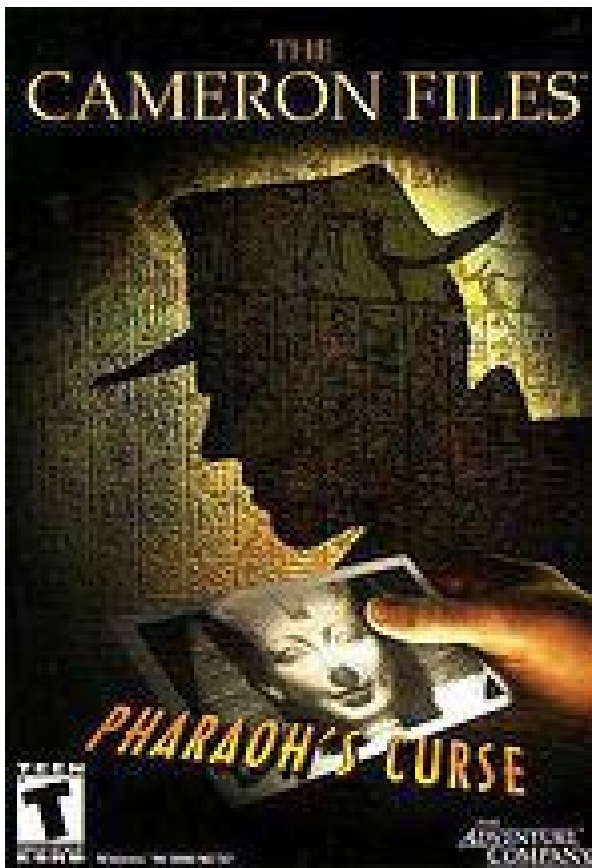
Pharaoh's Curse is the second adventure featuring P.I. Alan Parker Cameron. The first one was called Secret at Loch Ness and it took place in lake Loch Ness. This time Cameron travels to a warmer place. This is one more 1st person adventure taking place in Egypt in the long list of adventures that have used the ancient Egyptian mysteries as a basis for their story. Unfortunately like most of them, this adventure also fails to give a positive outcome.

Story: The story of Pharaoh's curse is lacking originality, cohesion and depth. The developers probably tried to make an Indiana Jones/The Mummy hybrid and failed miserably. I have to say here that whether you call the hero of our game Cameron or Indiana Jones is not going to make much difference, because it is clear like crystal that Cameron was made with Indiana Jones in mind. You can see that by the way he is touching his fedora all the time, and by the several Indy whips and fedoras scattered around in the game. There is even a guest in the hotel registry called Dr. Jones.

The story starts quite abruptly with Cameron arriving at his hotel in Cairo looking for his friend Moira McFarley that has asked for his help. Cameron is to investigate some strange happenings in the local museum. Actually the whole structure of the story is quite strange. The game starts abrupt with not much information, it slowly starts forming a quite ok story around the middle of the game, and suddenly at this point it turns into a puzzle marathon and just forgets about the story. By the end of the game

(which comes quite early since the game is rather short) you are not given any answers to several questions that you are being posed during the progress of the story, like the motives of some characters or their background. Moira McFarley that is a key character in the story for example, does not say a single word in the whole game.
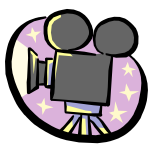
Graphics: In the graphics factor, Pharaoh's Curse gives also a bad performance. Despite the fact that the cutscenes are amazing and very impressive, the in-game graphics are bad and outdated. The worst of all concerning in-game graphics is how fast your view turns when you move the mouse. People who have problems with nausea while playing 1st person games are likely to have big problems with Pharaoh's Curse. With the slightest movement of the mouse your screen turns really fast and then when you stop moving it the screen stops immediately, giving you the impression that you control the Tazmanian devil and not P.I. Cameron. In the beginning of the game I was wandering if my character was supposed to be drunk at this moment, because of this bad speed issue.

Although the several backgrounds are quite pleasant to watch the outdated slide-show engine becomes cumbersome from the first moments of the game. The screens have actually quite a bit of distance from each other, thus giving you the feeling that Cameron is jumping or teleporting from one place to the next instead of walking.

Pharaoh's Curse

Developer: **The Adventure Company**
Category: **Point and click**
Perspective: **1st person**
Difficulty: **Hard**
Site:
www.adventurecompanygames.com

Where to buy it:
www.webhallen.com

Sound: The sound of Pharaoh's Curse is in fact the best aspect of the whole game. The several music tracks are magnificent and match with the theme of the game. It makes you feel like you are listening to the soundtrack of a movie. You understand the high quality of the music from the first moment, since the track in the starting menu is one of the best I've heard in adventures. The voices of the several characters are also very well performed. The sound in general is crystal clear and detailed.

Gameplay: Until the middle of the game I thought that the gameplay was not that bad. The puzzles were quite straightforward until that point. But then the developers, probably in an attempt to prolong the short story of the game decided to force the player in a 'hide and seek' game with the necessary items that you have to collect. I cannot explain otherwise why half of the items you have to find lie hidden in dark corners behind large objects.

Apparently they have not realized yet that in our age pixel hunting is considered terribly annoying and irritating (especially now that some games use 1024x768 pixels…there are just too many of them to hunt). The worst part is that most of them cannot be noticed by sight, but by cursor-swapping, that is to say, you understand there is something there because your cursor changed and not because you saw it, since most of the objects you need to collect are smaller than your large ugly cursor in the middle of the screen.

The interface is also irritating. Apart from the large ugly cursor that I just mentioned path finding is quite bad (due to teleportation-kind-of-movement and cursor moving with the speed of light), and it is also cumbersome to escape screens like your inventory and the several document close-ups.

General info: The box of the game reminds you of…guess who…Indiana Jones. The game comes in 2 CDs and you only have to swap disks once. With the game you also get a big Syberia poster, which was really neat and now Kate Walker adorns the walls of my room.

The game run flawlessly and there were no bugs at all. The fast loading times was a plus.

In a few words… A quite mediocre game. Starts bad, achieves to form something entertaining near the middle but then it just loses interest in the end and seems more like an awkward development than anything else. Bad developed story, outdated graphics and clumsy gameplay. The best things I can remember from the game were the music, some cutscenes and… the Syberia poster. There are other adventures in the market that deserve your money more than this one. It could offer a few entertaining moments if you have nothing better to play though.

System Requirements:

Windows 98/Me/2000/XP

Pentium II 233 MHZ

64 MB RAM

16x CD-ROM

DIRECTX SOUNDCARD

DIRECTX VIDEO CARD

Story	55
Graphics	68
Sound	96
Gameplay	50
Overall	65
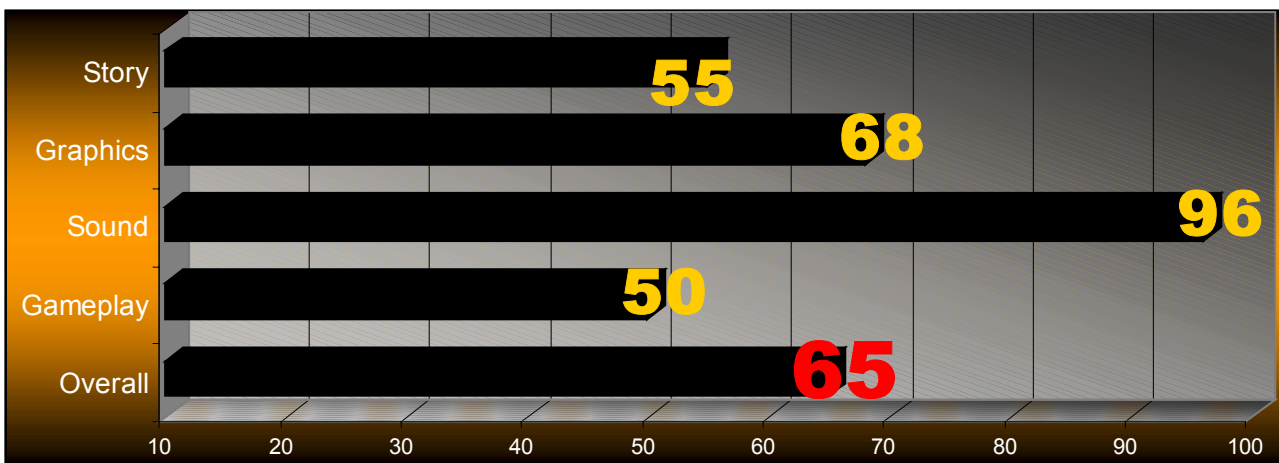
ONCE AGAIN
THE MILLENNIUM TURNS

AND STILL
THE GREATEST MYSTERY
OF THE LAST 2000 YEARS
REMAINS BURIED

**REVIEW
TRIBUTE**

GABRIEL KNIGHT
*Blood of
the sacred*   **III**   *Blood of
the damned*

NOW IT FALLS TO ONE MAN
TO UNRAVEL THE
STAGGERING REVELATION
BOILING IN

THE BLOODLINE OF
CHRIST

Et in Arcadia ego . . .

Jane Jensen is a magician and stories are her spells. Once you have played one of her games you are going to be spellbound forever. I wrote that in the review of Gabriel Knight 2, I write it now in the review of Gabriel Knight 3 and I hope a Gabriel Knight 4 will be released sometime in the future so that I will have to write it once more. Because her adventures, are the kind of stories that make reviewers open their dictionaries to find new words that are going to be able to express the excellence of her games.

The Gabriel Knight series is considered by many the best examples of what kind of stories are adventures capable of telling in the most immerse way. In the latest poll of Just Adventure for the best adventure of all time, Gabriel Knight 2 came first beating other great legends like The Longest Journey and Syberia. The first Gabriel Knight was made in 2D graphics, the second one in FMV. Now this time Gabriel comes in 3 dimensions and Jane Jensen proves that whatever the graphics style, it is the story and the gameplay that makes an adventure good or bad. Now let's go to what Jane knows and does best.

Story

Yes, it is a 'dictionary' moment. Amazing, remarkable, incredible, inconceivable, excellent, brilliant, exceptional. You have to play and finish Gabriel Knight 3 to understand what I am writing about. It is not everyday that you see someone taking the most widespread religion and turning it upside down, giving it a whole new dimension.

Gabriel Knight 3 will have to do with the likes of christianity, the freemasons, the priory of Sion, the ancient Greek philosophers and mathematicians, the Egyptian mythology, the Romans and the crusades, the Knight Templars, the Merovingians, the temple of Solomon, astronomy, geometry, secret cults and beliefs and in this hurricane of concepts Jane Jensen throws in also vampires, their eternal lust for blood and the enigma buried along with its bearer, Abbe Sauniere, under the grounds of the village Rennes le Chateau. If you think that I have just spoiled the story for you, then you can relax because what I just wrote is not even enough for a warm up of what is about to happen in Gabriel Knight 3.

The story of the game starts in the comic book provided with the game, where Gabriel and Grace are invited by Prince James of Albany, current heir of the Kings of Scotland. The reason that the shadow hunter (Gabriel) is called upon is that someone is after the Stewart heirs. Night visitors, as they are called, sneak during the night in their rooms and bite their victims on the neck drinking their blood. It has been impossible so far to stop them or trace them, and Gabriel's

mission is to protect the prince's newborn son from these night visitors.

Even Gabriel however is unable to stop them and the night visitors manage to intrude in the baby's room and kidnap him. Gabriel starts chasing the night visitors in a manhunt that brings him to the French village of Rennes le Chateau and leaves him with a nasty bruise on the head. A taxi driver brings him to the local hotel where there is also a tour group that is looking for a mythical treasure rumoured to be buried somewhere in the area.

From that point you take control of Gabriel and your goal is to find the kidnappers and return the baby to prince James. The story is split in 3 days and as in GK2 you take control both of Gabriel and Grace. Gabriel does more of a 'detective' work while Grace is more into research, but both will have to cross over the limits of their roles at certain points.

The beginning is a bit slow and you will probably wonder what all these reviewers are fond of with this game. But from the end of day 1 things heat up and as you solve

more and more enigmas and the pieces of the 'puzzle' get together you will just be amazed by the storyline. Gabriel Knight 3 is actually a proof that no reviewer should review a game before they finish it. If I reviewed GK3 at the end of day 1 I would give it around 75%, in the end of day 2 around 85% and by the end of day 3 (and end of game) 94%. Actually the ending is one of the best, if not the best in adventures and one of the longest at the same time.

The story is also very long, and I am certain that this is one game that could not be turned into a movie without missing more than 80% of the plot. The characters are all very mysterious and you are not able to make out each one's real intentions until late in the game. The dialogues are excellent also, they build up the story in a maestrical way in conjunction with the large amounts of documents that you have to read (especially while using Grace). Suspense and mystery flow lavishly throughout the story and you will be sitting on the edge of your chair quite often.

Graphics
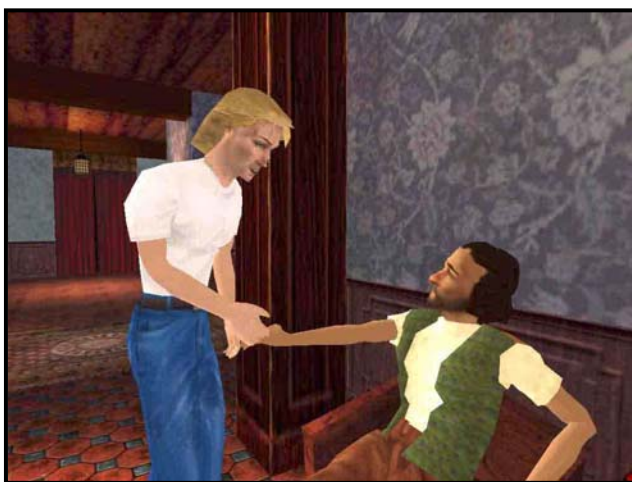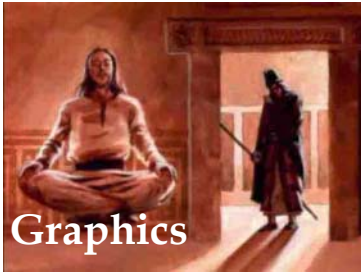
GK3 uses a very original 3D engine where you see the game from a 3rd person perspective but at the same time you control the camera and you can view the world from any point you want. This feature gives a very immersive feeling and makes you feel like you are actually there. However at times it is cumbersome to have to move the camera constantly, and maybe it would have been better if there was an option where the camera would move and change angles automatically.

Sierra took a big risk for its time by jumping on to 3D graphics. Most adventures that tried moving to 3D failed miserably, with Gabriel Knight 3 being one of the few exceptions. The graphics are not really great, but they are not bad either. Actually there are some parts that are very beautifully depicted and some that look very ugly.
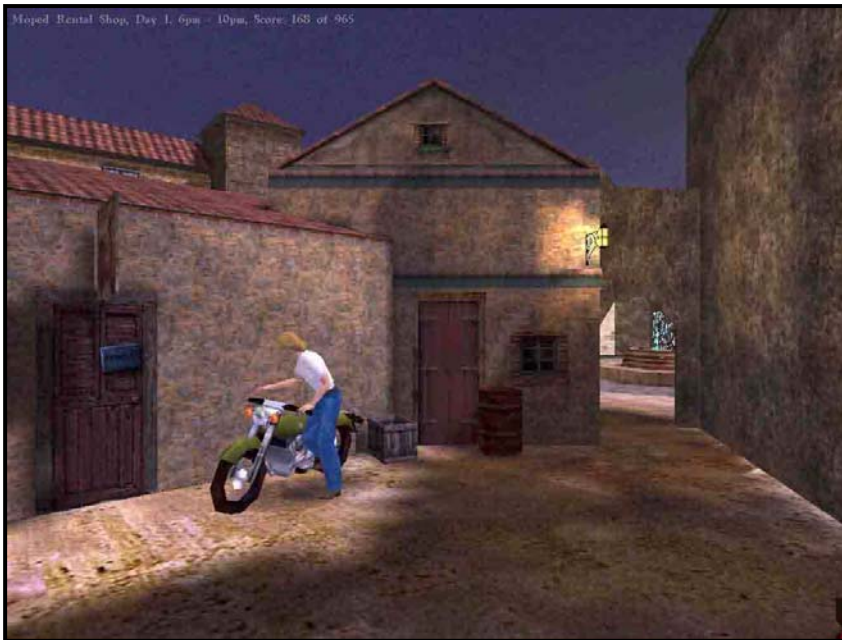
Some of the parts that were well made were the faces of the characters and the several buildings. A lot of detail has been give to both. The movements of the character's faces especially radiate a lot of emotions during the game. The bodies however were very badly drawn in opposition to the faces and they seem more like robot parts glued together. It actually looks as if different persons drew the heads and different the bodies, since if you pay close attention you will notice that even the colour of the skin differs from body to head.

Another part that was badly drawn was the nature sceneries. Grass looks awkward and the trees look very artificial. It seems like 3D was not ready at the time for living organisms since the low-detailed polygons give a robot feeling to everything. Nevertheless much detail has been given to everything else. I have seen a real photo of Rennes le Chateau's church and the church in the game looks incredibly the same.

One more thing that is bad unfortunately when it comes to graphics, are the cutscenes. While the events that occur during the cutscenes are intriguing and exciting the graphics are bad and the characters look more like clay dolls than real people. As a whole though the engine is very intuitive and something that has not been done before so all in all the graphics of the game though not perfect they are quite good.

Sound

Probably the worst part of the game is the acting of Gabriel by Tim Curry. It has to be one of the worst voice-overs in the history of voice-overs for any medium. I remember myself when I first heard his voice wishing that Gabriel never had to talk in the game because it was really a big disappointment. It is exaggerated and makes Gabriel sound like a stupid person.

The rest of the actors did an excellent job and those that I could distinguish for their remarkable work were Charity James as Grace, Joe Lala as Vitorio Bucceli and John de Lancie as Montreaux.

The music is well performed and uses a mix of ambient tracks for the eerie parts of the game with the addition of some more intense ones during more exciting events. I have to say though that GK2 did a much better job in the music department than the third one.

The sound effects are very good and the surround sound in combination with the 3D representation makes it possible to recognize the source of specific sounds that in certain points hint you where to look at.

Gameplay

GK3 combines a point and click interface with a 3D environment and it works absolutely smooth, it is actually the only interface in a 3D adventure that has worked so far. You move the camera either with your mouse (by pressing the button at the same time) or with the keyboard keys and when you stop moving the camera you can browse your screen with your cursor. When you browse your cursor over a hotspot and click on it, you get different actions that Gabriel or Grace can do with them like inspect, look, use, open etc. A neat feature was the 'hide' icon that allowed you to hide behind walls or trees when you wanted to avoid being noticed by others.

The puzzles are quite difficult but they are more challenging than irritating. They are also very well tied to the story except for one or two. One of the puzzles that I am sure everybody who played it remembers is Le Serpent Rouge, which is one of the most well thought and implemented puzzles in the history of adventure games. When I finished it I felt an intense feeling of achievement that I have never felt before by solving a puzzle (however I should warn you that you will probably be bound to start screaming at your monitor while solving it).

The length of the game is also noteworthy. If I should make an estimate I guess it would take around 35 hours for an average adventurer to finish it and experience most of the stuff in the game. In order to write this review I played GK3 for the second time and it took me around 25 hours to finish it. Bearing in mind that I had finished it before and that I had 840 out of the 960 points that is the maximum score then you understand what kind of length we are talking about.
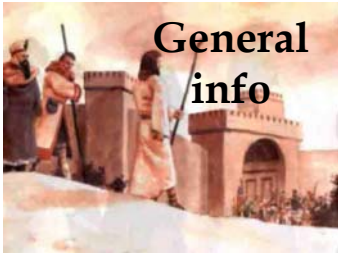
General info

GK3 includes 3 CDs, a manual and a comic book that explains the beginning of the story. The box art is one more time beautiful and impressive like its predecessor and you can see it in the cover of The Inventory this month. Unfortunately the budget version that is available mostly nowadays is not that good looking.

Although it has received good critics from the majority of magazines and e-zines, it has not sold as well as the second part, hence Sierra had decided to stop the series there (they actually have decided to stop all their adventure series).

Gabriel Knight 3
Blood of the sacred
Blood of the damned

Developer: **Sierra**
Category: **Point and click / 3D**
Perspective: **3rd person**
Difficulty: **Hard**
Site: **www.sierra.com**

Where to buy it:

www.webhallen.com
www.gamesmix.com
www.amazon.co.uk

However, some months ago Jane Jensen posted in the Gabriel Knight forums and asked the members of that forum what is it that they like in the GK series. She also said in an interview with a magazine that she is working on a new project but she did not say whether this project is a new game or not. We can only hope that her new project is a new adventure game.

If you want more information on the predecessor, GK2, you can read the review tribute in Inventory 1. There has been released a new budget version of GK2 recently in the Nordic region. If you want more information on Jane Jensen you can visit her personal site:

www.janejensen.com

System Requirements:

Windows 95/98/Me/2000

Pentium I 166 MHZ

32 MB RAM

4x CD-ROM

WINDOWS SOUNDCARD

4MB GRAPHICS CARD

16 BIT COLOR

To get you started

Open the closet. Get the wire hanger and the sticky note part. Get out of the room. Go down the stairs. Talk to the receptionist and then introduce yourself to the man who is reading the newspaper (Emilio Baza). Go behind the red curtains in the phone booths and use Prince James' card on the phone in order to call him. Get out of the phone booths. This should get you started.

Rennes Le Chateau Gallery

The amount of work that was dedicated to Gabriel Knight 3 can be appreciated by noticing the similarities of the game world with the real world counterparts. The three pictures above show the interiors of the church of Rennes le Chateau while the three pictures below show the demon Asmodeus (that can also be found in the church of Rennes le Chateau) a portrait of Sauniere and … well I leave the last one without comments since I would spoil the story if I told you what it is. One of the reasons I gave such a high mark on the graphics of the game although they have a number of flaws, is the addition of even the smallest detail in the game world, in order to make you feel like you are really there.
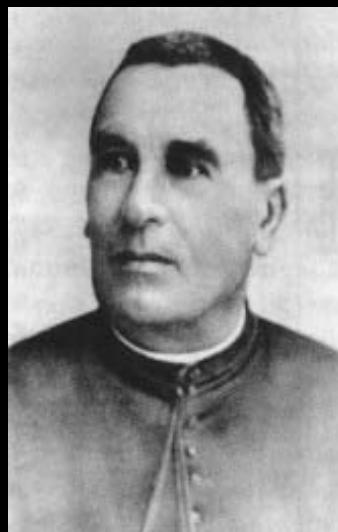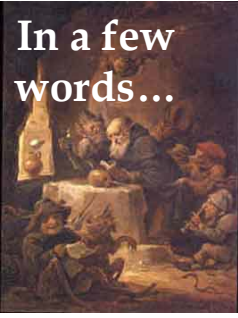
Jane Jensen did it again. She left her mark one more time in the history of adventures. One of the best and most controversial stories ever told along with some great gameplay. The only downsides are the acting of Tim Curry and some bad aspects in the graphics department. One of the best adventures ever that no one should miss.

Story	99
Graphics	90
Sound	83
Gameplay	97
Overall	94
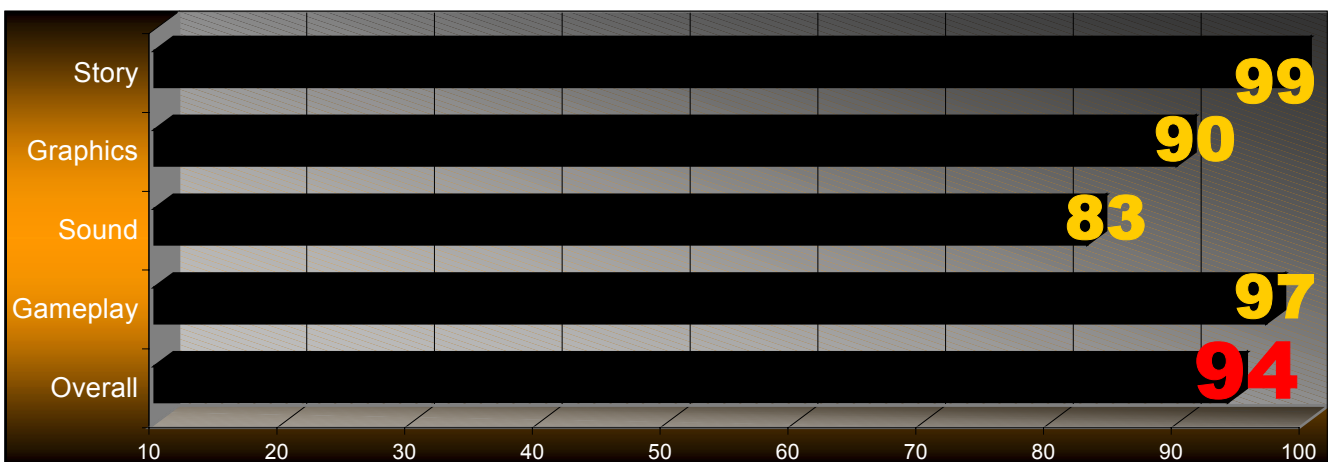
Help for developers

Since I saw some adventures lately that would make a bad example for our genre it seems to me that it is more the developers that need help than the beginners. So I changed this column to an article that will include guidelines towards developers in order to make a good product that will deserve our money. And keep in mind one thing: The adventurer (customer) is ALWAYS RIGHT. So here we go:

*Testing
It seems like a lot of developers underestimate the importance of releasing a bug-free product. Produce the best game in the world with 12D graphics, classical soundtrack orchestrated by Hans Zimmer and use Bruce Willis as an actor. What good does it do if I cannot play the game due to some bug? Alpha test, Beta test, Gamma test…even Omega test your product if necessary in order to be absolutely sure that it is going to run flawlessly to every machine that meets the system requirements you put on the side of the game-box.

*Gameplay/puzzles
The people that you are targeting your product to are not rocket scientists (ok maybe a couple of them are, but the biggest majority are not). You have to make sure throughout your game that the puzzles and tasks you set upon them are logical, make sense and will not lead them to the Internet searching for a walkthrough. When you design a puzzle don't think in the way 'how am I going to keep them stuck and make them start hitting their heads on the wall' but instead take yourself in the shoes of the adventurer. If you were set upon the task that you are planning to give your player, would you have found the solution in a reasonable amount of time, or would you have start swearing in your own native language? If you think you would, then go on to the next step. Have other people try to solve it and listen carefully to their feedback.

Another point to be aware of here is that you have to always make clear to the user what they need to do next in order to proceed in the story. You cannot just leave them in the game world not having a clue what they have to do next. A good paradigm for that would be The Longest Journey. The player always knows what to do next, and even if you forget or if you didn't notice you could always read the diary where April hinted at what she had to do next.

Furthermore it is very important to understand that pixel hunting is something that is generally hated by adventure gamers. Do not try to hide tiny little objects behind other large objects. We want to play an adventure, get exposed to a great story, be immersed in a realistic game world with interesting and memorable characters. We do not want to play hide-and-seek with tiny little objects on the screen. So make the various objects big and clearly visible.

Nordic Adventure Guild

There were some people that were asking me through mails what is the Nordic Adventure Guild. Some years ago adventures were considered dead. Now we have seen some good attempts to bring adventures back on the forefront, so I thought that the adventure fans could try and help adventures now in such a critical time.

I started an adventure club in the Nordic Region where I live. Yngvil Runde was the first person that replied to my plead for help and then slowly the Guild grew. Now we have 40 members, among them some developers also. I send a couple of newsletters to the club members every month telling them about adventure news and giving them information about the Inventory.

NAG has already tried to help some developers find publishers for their games, and in the next month we are going to try and press some publishers here in the Nordic Region to ship some adventure games that we have not seen yet in the shelves around here.

Unfortunately NAG does not have a site or forums yet, and this is due to my zero-time left with the Inventory and my personal activities going on at the same time. But I hope that in the next couple of months we will have a site so that our members can come and talk with each other about adventures.

Another goal of the guild is to introduce people to adventures. I have already visited forums that are concerned with history, science fiction, art and fantasy and told them about a new form of entertainment that they would probably be interested in. I described adventures as interactive stories where they would take the roll of the main character and try to progress through the story by the means of conversation and collection of objects and information.

If you come from Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland or Iceland then feel free to send an e-mail either to theinventory@yahoo.com or to ithill_anorien@hotmail.com to become a member of our guild. Membership is of course for free and you are not obligated to do anything if you do not feel like doing anything. You can just receive your newsletters. Of course if you feel like contributing in any way you are free to do so.

I hope that many of you will want to join our attempts to help adventure games reach the place which they once owned.

Epilogue

The biggest Inventory so far has come to its end. Unfortunately Post Mortem's premier in the Nordic region has been postponed for the end of February so we are not going to have a review of Post Mortem on Inventory 4, but it will hopefully be the review of the month for Inventory 5.

However The Inventory 4 will have some VERY interesting guests on the celebrity corner next month. We will also probably feature reviews of Blade Runner and Shadows of Memories. The developers, who are reading the Inventory, will also have the chance to read some more guidelines in order to turn their games into classics.

After having completed the first 3 issues, looking back and reflecting over the quality of the three magazines, I would have to say that the layout of the first was quite bad, and the screenshots of Gabriel Knight 2 review tribute especially were of very low quality. So I have decided that sometime in the future (either during the summer or next November when the Inventory will have completed one year) you are going to have the possibility of downloading a special edition of the first issue with better screenshots, a better layout and maybe a couple of additions.

I would like to thank Frogwares and Tierra for being so friendly and informative. It was a real pleasure to have all of you in the celebrity corner this month, I wish you all good luck with your games and I hope that you are going to support the adventure genre for many years to come. I would also like to thank all our readers for the great comments that you have either been sending us on e-mails or posting them in the forums. I am glad to read that the majority of our readers print out the Inventory and read it in their comfortable reading chairs! This was the way this magazine was meant to be experienced like.

I would also like to thank several international adventure sites for putting a link to our magazine. So if you are German speaking make sure to visit www.adventure-treff.de for some great adventure news. If you want to check out the biggest archive of adventure games then visit www.adventure-archiv.com (both German and English) and if you are French speaking take a look in www.aventurepc.com for some more adventure games news in your local language. Furthermore do not forget to visit www.adventuredevelopers.com to be introduced to the biggest site dedicated exclusively to independent developers. Till next month…
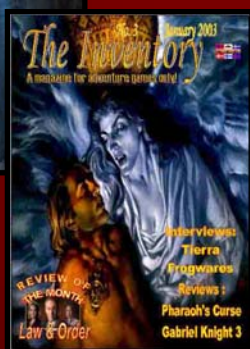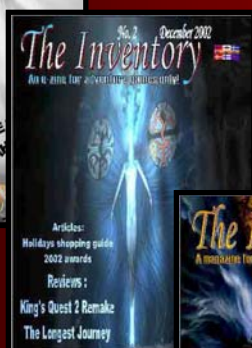
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